1: Whiting E-5 (1936-1937) 1941
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[593] already been told. The status of father and mother is important enough to summarize here, however, even at the risk of repetition. By the time a Kwoma couple marry, they are well aware of the assets of a large family. They know that a son will help with gardening, housebuilding, and the other economic tasks, that, when he grows up, he will stand by them in the struggle against sorcery and in disputes over property, that he will increase the prestige of the family in the community, and finally that he will support them when they grow old. The young couple know that a daughter is also an asset. She will help with economic tasks until she marries and [583] she will also bring prestige to them. Furthermore, her bride- [842] price will bring in shell money which the sons will need to pay for their wives. For these reasons a man and woman set out [586] to produce children as quickly as possible and are gravely disappointed if they cannot do so. Indeed, a barren marriage often leads to divorce.[39]

842 The Kwoma believe that a fetus is formed from the mix- • 843 ture of the woman's blood and the man's sperm and that repeated insemination is necessary to cause fertilization. They know that the cessation of menstruation is a sign of pregnancy, but do not cease their sexual relations until the woman is big with child. A woman observes certain food taboos during pregnancy. She does not eat certain kinds of fish, flying fox, or cassowary in order to insure a normal and healthy child, and she may not eat birds lest the child grow feathers in place of hair.

844 When the expectant mother goes into labor, her husband must leave the house, and he and all other men must stay away until the child is delivered. Her own mother is called to attend her, and the adult women of the household or near- [754] by households assist. These women take charge of the baby when it is born, cut the umbilical cord, and bury the placenta under the floor of the house to prevent it from coming into the hands of a sorcerer.

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[39] I am not certain whether barrenness constitutes formal grounds for divorce. The fact that there were several couples still married, who had no children except by adoption, suggests that it is not. In two of the four cases of divorce on which I have detailed information, barrenness was given as one of the reasons for the separation.